

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method (300) of compressing a digital image including a matrix of elements each one consisting of at least one component of different type representing a pixel, the method comprising the steps
5 of:

splitting (340) the digital image into a plurality of blocks and calculating, for each block, a group of DCT coefficients for the components of each type,

10 quantizing (350a-355a) the DCT coefficients of each group using a corresponding quantization table scaled by a gain factor for achieving a target compression factor,

characterized by the steps of
15 further quantizing (350+355) the DCT coefficients of each group using the corresponding quantization table scaled by a pre-set factor,

arranging (360) the further quantized DCT coefficients in a zig-zig vector,

20 calculating (365-370) a basic compression factor provided by the quantization table scaled by the pre-set factor as a first function of the zig-zag vector,

estimating (375) the gain factor as a second
25 function of the basic compression factor, the second function being determined experimentally according to the target compression factor.

2. The method (300) according to claim 1, wherein the step (365-370) of calculating the basic compression factor includes the steps of:

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determining (365) a first number of bits
5 required to encode the zig-zag vector,
calculating (370) the basic compression
factor summing the first number of bits with a second
number of bits required to encode control values, and
dividing the sum by the number of elements of the digital
10 image.

3. The method (300) according to claim 1 or
2, wherein the second function is a quadratic function.

4. The method (300) according to any claim
from 1 to 3, further comprising the steps of:
storing a plurality of sets of parameters
representing the second function, each set of
5 parameters being associated with a corresponding value
of the target compression factor,
selecting (310) an image quality and
determining a current value of the target compression
factor as a function of the selected image quality,
10 reading (375) the parameters associated with
the current value of the target compression factor and
estimating the gain factor using the read parameters.

5. The method (300) according to any claim
from 1 to 4, wherein the pre-set factor is determined
experimentally according to the target compression
factor.

6. The method (400) according to any claim
from 1 to 5, further comprising the steps of:

storing (345) the DCT coefficients onto a
working memory and concurrently performing the steps of

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5 quantizing (350-355) the DCT coefficients of each group
using the corresponding quantization table scaled by
the pre-set factor, arranging (360) the quantized DCT
coefficients in the zig-zig vector, calculating (365-
370) the basic compression factor, and estimating (375)
10 the gain factor,

reading (378) the DCT coefficients from the
working memory for performing the step of quantizing
(350a-355a) the DCT coefficients of each group using
the corresponding quantization table scaled by the gain
15 factor.

7. A device (115) for compressing a digital
image including a matrix of elements each one
consisting of at least one digital component of
different type representing a pixel, the device (115)
5 comprising means (145) for splitting the digital image
into a plurality of blocks and calculating, for each
block, a group of DCT coefficients for the components
of each type, means (150) for quantizing the DCT
coefficients of each group using a corresponding
10 quantization table scaled by a gain factor for
achieving a target compression factor,

characterized in that

the device (115) further includes means (150)
for further quantizing the DCT coefficients of each
15 group using the corresponding quantization table scaled
by a pre-set factor, means (155) for arranging the
further quantized DCT coefficients in a zig-zig vector,
means (170,190) for calculating a basic compression
factor provided by the quantization table scaled by the
20 pre-set factor as a first function of the zig-zag
vector, and means (170) for estimating the gain factor

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as a second function of the basic compression factor, the second function being determined experimentally according to the target compression factor.

8. The device (115) according to claim 7, further comprising a quantization unit (150) which quantizes the DCT coefficients of each group using the corresponding quantization table scaled by the gain factor in a first operative condition and which
5 quantizes the DCT coefficients of each group using the corresponding quantization table scaled by the pre-set factor in a second operative condition.

9. The device (115) according to claim 7 or 8, wherein the means (170, 190) for calculating the basic compression factor includes means (190) for determining a first number of bits required to encode
5 the zig-zag vector, and means (170) for calculating the basic compression factor summing the first number of bits with a second number of bits required to encode control values and dividing the sum by the number of elements of the digital image

10. The device (115) according to claim 9, further comprising a DCT unit (145) comprising the means for splitting the digital image and for calculating the DCT coefficients, a zig-zag unit (155)
5 comprising the means for arranging the further quantized DCT coefficients in the zig-zig vector, a memory unit (175) for storing the quantization tables, a counting unit (190) comprising the means for calculating the first number of bits, a processor unit
10 (170) for controlling the device (115), communication

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means (120) for connecting the DCT unit, the
quantization unit, the zig-zag unit, the memory unit,
the counting unit and the processor unit therebetween,
the processor unit (170) calculating the basic
15 compression factor and estimating the gain factor under
the control of a program stored onto the memory unit
(175).

11. A digital still camera (100) comprising
the device (115) of any claim from 7 to 10.

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